

“We prioritise the teaching of reading in our school. One in four of our students start Year 7 reading below their chronological age: in line with the national average. Fresh Start helps them catch up quickly and enthusiastically.”

We spoke to Kathryn Newby who teaches Fresh Start to pupils in Year 7 and above.

Teaching reading – the timetable challenge

We work hard to arrange the timetable so students who need to learn to read are taught to do so. We have a two-week timetable, an X and a Y band for Year 7 and mixed lunch breaks so this is a challenge!

We aim for students to have three Fresh Start lessons a week for 30 minutes: either individually or in a group of two to four. We avoid taking children out of core subjects although those with very low levels of literacy may be withdrawn from an English lesson. Students miss a subject no more than once a week. My sole responsibility is teaching reading. We are considering training a teaching assistant to provide more Fresh Start sessions too.



Assessment on entry means no student slips through the net

Last year, we assessed all students with a reading age under nine using the Fresh Start assessment. This year, I have assessed every Year 7 student and this has worked better. I can tell quickly which students need Fresh Start teaching and no student slips through the net. I've identified 35 students for this academic year.

School information

Number of pupils: 735

Pupils taught Fresh Start 2021/2022: 23

The school is part of the Astrea Trust

Some are brand new to English, some have SEND. I have another 25 students in Years 8 – 11 who are new arrivals or did not graduate from Fresh Start last year due to poor attendance or very low starting points.

Access to online training helps us teach Fresh Start. Our students now have the skills needed to reach age-related expectations in reading; their confidence and enjoyment in reading increase every day. Access to the portal and the training films is so useful. It helps to review elements of the lessons and consolidate understanding of how to teach the programme.

Hear from our Fresh Start students

Year 7

“Fresh Start has helped me because if I can't read words, I break them down into chunks. I feel like I want to read more. I feel more confident and I read books at home now. In Year 6 and at the beginning of Year 7, I didn't want to read but now I do. I would like more of a chance to read out loud in lessons. I can read longer, harder words like 'Abergavenny'”.

Year 8

“I can read more fluently without stopping for every word. I feel more confident reading out loud. It has helped in science and history too as we read out loud a lot in these subjects”.

Case Study:

Astrea Academy Woodfields (secondary) Balby, Doncaster

Year 9

“The programme has made me better at reading. It was good to have three lessons a week”.

“I feel more confident as I can read more fluently. It’s easier to read out loud. I feel more confident in other lessons as I can now read and get a clear idea”.

“I can now read more quickly; I can spell better and I can read longer words”.

Astrea Trust

“We believe that every student needs to learn to read to succeed during their school years and beyond.”

Beck King, trust lead for Read Write Inc. Phonics and Fresh Start

In September 2021, we launched Fresh Start in our eight mainstream secondary academies. Fresh Start leaders and reading teachers were trained by Ruth Miskin Training. All academies receive termly development days and remote progress meetings with their consultant trainer. Within our trust, further development and support is provided by me, the National Lead for Literacy, Regional Directors and the Director of Secondary. Fresh Start students are engaged in their lessons, read accurately and fluently, and, importantly, have increased self-esteem.

